

Application No. 09/836,691
Amendment dated February 23, 2004
Reply to Office Action of August 14, 2003

AMENDMENTS TO THE SPECIFICATION:

Please amend paragraphs 22, 31, 33, 40, 41, 42, 53 as follows:

Sub
A1

[0022] A decisional step 260 determines whether there are more printers for which pricing information has not been received. If so, the method repeats steps 230 and 240 wherein pricing data is received and stored in the pricing database 150 for each component applicable to another printer. The information in the pricing database 150 can thus be used to calculate estimated prices for a print job with respect to a number of different printers. If there are no more printers (N in step 260), the [[The]] method then ends at step 270.

Sub
A2

[0031] The computer system 130 can make the set of specifications available to the preferred printer(s), preferably via the network 100, and also provide the identity of the buyer to the printers. Thus, in step 340, the printer has the option of reviewing the set of specifications and the estimated price and negotiating with the buyer to arrive at a price that is lower than the estimated price. If the printer decides to enter into price negotiations (Yes in step 340), the method proceeds to step 345. If no price negotiation is desired (No in step 340), the method proceeds directly to step 350. Once the contract has been agreed upon (Yes in step 350), the parties can sign the contract in step 355. If the contract is not agreed (No in step 350), the method ends at step 360.

A3

[0033] In some cases, a print job may be performed by one of a number of different processes. While the buyer may have specified a particular print process, the printer may be aware of another process for producing a substantially similar product, but at a reduced price. In step 345, the printer can use this opportunity to suggest a change in the set of specifications, which will result in a lower price for the print job. Once a negotiated set of specifications and a negotiated price has been agreed upon (Yes in step 350), the parties can sign a job estimate (or contract) for the print job in step 355. The job estimate may be signed electronically

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Q3

through the use of digital signatures. Alternatively, the computer system 130 can send contracts to the buyer and printer for manual execution. If the contract is not agreed (No in step 350), the method proceeds directly to step 360. The method then ends with step 360.

Q4

[0040] The present invention can advantageously use the pricing model discussed above to provide a price control structure for the buyer. Figure 4 is a flow diagram illustrating the operation of the computer system 130 in ensuring compliance with the pricing model. The method starts at step 400. In step 405, the print pricing estimator 140 generates a price estimate for an initial set of specifications (SPEC A). Assuming that the buyer and the printer both accept the price (Yes in step 410), the method continues to step 420. If there is no acceptance (No in step 410), the method ends at step 455. In step 420, the buyer or the printer can change the set of specifications originally agreed upon. If the set of specifications is changed (e.g., to SPEC B) (Yes in step 420), the method continues to step 425, wherein the printer sets a new price for the print job. In one embodiment, the printer can set the new price with the aid of the pricing model so as to be in compliance therewith. The printer can also set an invoice price and check with the model before invoicing the buyer to ensure compliance. Of course, the printer can set the price without using the pricing model. The printer then produces the print job in step 430 and invoices the buyer in step 435.

[0041] In step 440, the print pricing estimator 140 receives the set of specifications that resulted in the print job (SPEC B) and generates a price estimate based thereon. Then, in step 445, the computer system 130 compares the invoice price to the price estimate to determine whether the invoice price is higher than the estimated price. If the invoice price is substantially higher than the estimated price (for example, 5% higher), the system 130 determines that the printer has overcharged the buyer and penalizes the printer (step 450). The printer may, for example, be forced to reimburse the buyer the difference between the invoice price

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and the estimated price, plus an additional percentage of the price as a penalty. In more egregious cases, the printer can be assessed a greater penalty or even be denied participation in the print supply marketplace. The method then ends at step 455. Alternatively, if the invoice price is not higher than the estimated price (No in step 445), the method ends at step 455.

Q4

[0042] In the decisional step 420, if there are no changes to the specifications, the print job is printed in step 460 and the printer invoices the buyer in step 465. Then, in step 470, the computer system 130 compares the invoice price to the estimated price to determine whether the invoice price is substantially higher than the estimated price. If so, the printer can be penalized in step 450. The method then ends at step 455. Alternatively, if the invoice price is not higher than the estimated price (No in step 470), the method ends at step 455.

Q5

[0053] Figures [[7-14]] 7, 8, 9A, 9B, 10, 11, 12A, 12B, 13A, 13B and 14 illustrate one embodiment of a system by which a printer can enter pricing information into the pricing database 150. The computer system 130 can generate a number of screens (e.g., web pages) for display on the printer computer 120. The printer can access the screens to input pricing information into the pricing database 150.